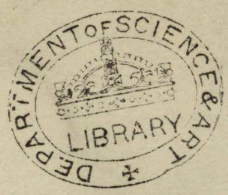


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Robinson, J. C.

Lecture on the Art Collections
at South Kensington.

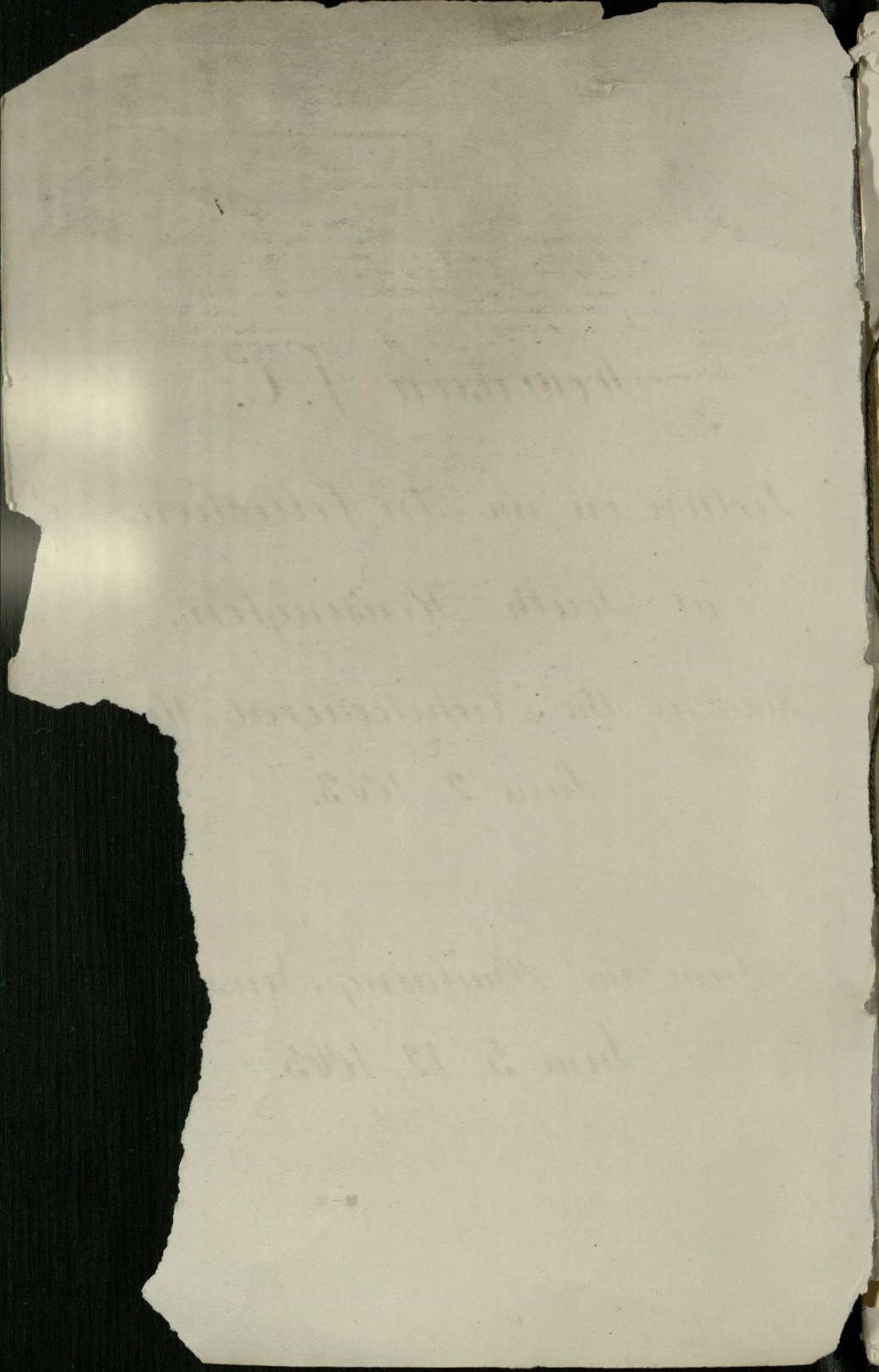
Read at the Architectural Museum
June 2, 1863.

From the Building News
June 5, 12, 1863.

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ON THE ART COLLECTIONS AT SOUTH KENSINGTON, CON-
SIDERED IN REFERENCE TO ARCHITECTURE.

By J. C. ROBINSON, F.S.A., &c.*

IT is easy to dilate in a merely general manner on the educational influence of museums and galleries of art. Everybody agrees that such collections are important objects of national concern as civilizing and refining agencies, and there is an implicit belief in the minds of most people, that somebody else—entire classes, in fact—are making a profound and earnest use of them in directly practical ways. Few care to think of museums as mere shows or places of pleasant recreation, though, in truth, ninety-nine out of a hundred use them as such. I wish I could show that our National Art Collections were as extensively frequented and as intimately studied by artists as the non-professional world imagines to be the case; but, unfortunately, alike amongst architects, painters, and sculptors, the systematic students of our museums and galleries are but few in number—they are, I fear, but rare exceptions to the general rule of almost contemptuous indifference.

To point out in detail the positive educational value and relation of a collection to any given art or subject of inquiry, on the other hand, is not an easy matter. To begin with, it presupposes in the illustrator an adequate knowledge of the particular speciality and a perfect acquaintance with the collection in question. In reference to the former qualification, it would be the height of presumption in me to omit to bespeak the kind indulgence of such an audience as the present; in the latter respect, I have more confidence, inasmuch as this collection has grown up, in great measure, under my hands.

I am, I trust, sufficiently impressed with a sense of my own inability to deal adequately with this subject, and particularly with a feeling of the vastness, complexity, and inherent difficulty of the subject of architecture in general; for as I estimate the province of architecture as a fine art, I am obliged to confess to myself that it includes, in a greater or less degree, nearly all the other arts, and that to grasp and fully master all its branches would seem almost a superhuman work, scarcely possible within the limits of a life.

As we all know, this was the view of the father of architectural literature, Vitruvius; but if the ideal architect of Vitruvius seems to us a being of impossible perfections, what must be our estimate of that great master who shall grasp the enormous mass of knowledge and precedent which has accumulated since Vitruvius's day? Doubtless, there is danger of confusing ourselves with visionary and impractical ideas—in other words, of forming an overstrained estimate of the extent and limits of architecture. I am convinced, however, that there is no evil in rating any art or concern at its highest value, and I shall therefore adhere to the highest view of the status of the modern architect.

But there have been men who have mastered the sum of all arts and practical knowledge of their epoch. I allude to those true universalists, the great artists of the period of the revival in Italy—to Brunelleschi, Bramante, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Raffaello—all architects in the fullest sense of the term. Under our modern system of subdivision of arts and labour, the versatility of these great men seems to us inexplicable, and we are apt to look back to them in despair as to a superior race of beings. Rather let us ask on what system were their vast powers acquired?—by what previous training, for instance, was Raffaello enabled to give to the world the beautiful Pandolfini Palace, his Madonna and life-like portraits, the great philosophical and religious fresco-pictures of the Vatican, the arabesques of the loggie, and the marble Jonah of the Chigi Chapel?

The answer I would give is, "less by any methodic or strictly academic system of training than by a tacit belief in the inherent unity of art which induced a habit of studying and taking daily, nay, even hourly, note of its monuments of every kind." It is well known that the vast and varied æsthetic knowledge displayed in the works of Raffaello, setting

aside his wonderful natural aptitude, resulted from the enthusiastic zeal with which he studied the monuments of precedent art around him. But it may be said, what has this to do with the question of modern museums? The Vatican in Raffaele's day was not the vast art gallery it has since become—true; but, to Raffaele, Rome itself was one vast museum. It is well known that Raffaele was one of the most enthusiastic connoisseurs of his age—an eager collector, giving up much of his precious time to the acquisition of antique remains, either for himself or the enlightened princes and prelates, who were only too happy to avail themselves of his knowledge and taste; and we have evidence enough in his drawings and sketches, that every ancient relic he acquired was a lesson to him, its particular facts of design or *technique* being assimilated in his mind, transmitted by the subtle alchemy of genius, and reproduced in new and noble guise. Now, if we are to have

Raffaelles and Michael Angelos in our own day, I feel convinced they must be formed in the same way. A principal object of my lecture to-night, then, is to show that this metropolis contains in its various collections a vast, perhaps an unequalled, treasure of works of art, far beyond anything Raffaele or Michael Angelo can have had access to, and to impress upon young students, and art-workmen in particular, the fact that, with such sources of instruction, the attainment of excellence in art is freely in their power—that there is now indeed no excuse for ignorance—that, in future, there need be no more so-called self-taught architects, no blundering half-artists, no incompetent art-workmen unable to get out of the old hackneyed grooves, no more complaints, in short, of the want of the means of instruction. When Lorenzo de Medici gave Michael Angelo the run of his garden, filled with antique statues, the boy quickly understood that he was expected to teach himself, and that there were masters all round him, each on his pedestal—mute, marbles, it is true, and yet speaking to him with the voices of Phidias, Scopas, and Praxiteles.

Here, too, is a garden, better stored than the good Lorenzo's!—here, indeed, Michael Angelo teaches in turn!

I have not the felicitous expression of your excellent President, and, therefore, I the more admired the just and striking manner in which, in his opening address, he made it evident that the non-acquaintance of artists with precedent monuments of art led but to a laborious travelling over old ground, to a finding out of supposed novelties which had nothing new in them—in short, to a constant striving without any real progress.

I cannot but think that when a man knows little or nothing of what past generations have done, he will himself produce little or nothing of good for the future—for obvious reasons, the ignorant are rarely, if ever, original; it is impossible even for the most self-reliant or indifferent artist entirely to escape the influence of the monuments of art around him; and if he be ignorant of the historical development of art, he will only the more easily be influenced by the passing fashion—that is, he will blindly follow some favourite model, who, for ought he knows, is but an imitation himself. Need I say, this is the great evil of our day—it is an old objection, that too great a familiarity with precedent art is liable to enslave and deaden the inventive faculties. I shall not stop to expose the fallacy; it is, however, true that, at the present day, we have too many special devotees of special styles, of which they know but the outer husk; this comes of getting a smattering only; it is exactly what a wider and more universal range of study would prevent.

Let us, then, see what the South Kensington Museum in particular offers to the architectural student.

In the first place, it must be borne in mind that the Museum is but, as it were, a creation of yesterday; that the collections are still rapidly growing; that they are only provisionally arranged; and that from necessary causes they are liable to continual shifting and displacement—at present, therefore, the Art Museum must be regarded as a rich treasury in which all may make research; in which discoveries may be made, sometimes the more interesting even from their being unexpected, but

not as a completely methodized institution.

It must not, however, be supposed that these art collections have been got together without design or definite system; on the contrary, a methodic and well understood scheme has from the first been carried out.

The Museum, on its first foundation in 1852, was specially intended to serve as an adjunct and necessary complement to the Government Schools of Art, and, generally speaking, to forward the interests of industrial or ornamental design. With the latter view, the incipient collection was, of course, soon made accessible to the public, and a new national museum was founded.

Four leading principles thereupon, as it were, came to the surface and have never since been lost sight of—the first was that it was not desirable to trench on the province of any existing public collections; and the second, that whatever was its range or speciality, it should be developed on the widest and most liberal basis, that the collection should, in fact, become the National Museum on its own speciality. Now the nation already possessed a vast and rapidly-increasing collection of works of art of the classical epochs; the arts of Greece and Rome, of all Pagan antiquity, in short, were well represented at the British Museum, but there they stopped; a beginning, it is true, had been made in the direction of Mediæval art, but efforts in that direction were not very kindly looked upon by the governing body of that great institution; and whilst France, for instance, with her Musée de Cluny possessed a most valuable and practically useful collection of works of Mediæval and Renaissance art, England had taken but the first timid step in that direction. The work to be done was thus clearly indicated, and thenceforth the creation of a collection, illustrating all art of what we may term the modern or Christian epoch, other than painting and its accessory developments—branches, already provided for elsewhere—was undertaken; and I think we may now point with satisfaction to the progress made in ten years' time; for at this moment we have a collection almost as much superior to the Musée de Cluny, as the latter was to the Mediæval Section of the British Museum in 1852.

The South Kensington Museum, then, offers to all, and especially to architects, as the true masters and leaders of all industrial artists, a treasure of works of decorative art in almost every vehicle, ranging from the first timid efforts of the Byzantine artists of the early centuries, when art awoke in Europe from the night of barbarism which had eclipsed the old Roman empire; through the successive phases of Mediæval Christian art, Gothic as it is still convenient to term it, Renaissance or Cinque-Cento in all its varieties, Louis Quatorze, &c., down to the revived Gothic of our own day, and the brilliant and facile styles of modern France.

To follow all these phases in detail would be far beyond my present limits. I am embarrassed with the abundance of materials at my choice. I have selected—not, it is true, at random, but with great indecision—the beautiful objects you see before you, to serve me in some respects as texts for the imperfect and discursive illustrations which are, I fear, alone possible to night; but, in the first place, let me say a few words on the great question of the present aspect of art in reference to the revival of obsolete styles, because I fancy it will occur to some of my hearers to suppose that I am going to advocate an eclectic system of calling forms and details from first one object and then another, from styles and local peculiarities, from characteristic features induced by specialities of material or vehicle, &c., and so forming, as it were, a modern Composite order of architecture. Now this is exactly what I wish to guard against; and, though I fear the endeavour is beyond my skill, I am most anxious to show that this is not the true use of precedent art, and that, on the contrary, as I have said before, the wider and more liberal are the studies of the true artist, the more completely exempt will he be from the enthralling influence of obsolete styles.

My wish is to show that a close and earnest analysis of beautiful works of art will not lead to their vulgar imitation, but, on the contrary, to a

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healthy perception of the great principles which are, as it were, latent in them, and which, when truly apprehended, will exercise such a general refining and instructive influence on the student as will strengthen and invigorate his original powers, and not warp and fetter them as the weak fibre of ignorance.

There is a great chain of art, as it were, reaching down from classical antiquity almost to our own times—I say *almost*, for the only sudden breaks in the links have been in our own days, by the eclectic revivals of the present century. We are now, in fact, operating a great Renaissance. Just as in the 15th and 16th centuries, European society at large reverted with passionate eagerness to the arts and literature of classical antiquity, so now we, in this present age, are reviving Mediævalism; we are even producing the Renaissance itself. Unhappily, however, these revivals are, for the most part, only literal resuscitations of extinct styles; from what cause I scarcely know, they nearly always lack that vitality, that creative or rather transmuting force, which, in the Middle Ages, laid hold of precedent art and gave an entirely new colouring, fresh and distinctive garbs of beauty, to old and well-known forms—it is this which we cannot do now-a-days.

That there is great impatience of this thralldom of the styles, as I may characterize it, amongst young architects, I am quite aware; and on all hands we witness endeavours to escape from bondage; but these efforts, on the other hand, too often take the shape of earnest, it may be, but inevitably cold-blooded attempts to achieve absolute originality. Now, I believe there is some occult law in nature—some fatality which makes itself felt in all such instances—whoever openly professes originality, usually achieves either novel ugliness and absurdity, or at best a new medley—some glaring and disjointed pastuio.

What then remains for us? In plain words, how is the young architect to form a consistent and truthful style for himself? Certainly, on the basis of learning and respect for previous canons, we have already assumed this principle:—First and foremost, I hold that he must teach himself how to get professional knowledge—how to observe. Now there are two methods of looking at architectural monuments, I mean ancient buildings, and also such works of art as are on the table before us. The first is the historical and archæological view; this, of course, is very important to the architect. He should so critically study such works as to master their principal facts of style, in reference to the date and conditions of their production. Knowledge of this kind should underlie every other—in many ways impossible to be specified; such knowledge will improve the practical judgment and power of the architect. Next, all these things should be studied *abstractedly* or *analytically*; that is, taking up, for instance, any one of these objects—knowing at a glance all that is necessary about its history and origin, use or intention, the student should ask himself, “and what is the inherent æsthetic value of this object?” What can I gather from it of direct use to me and my art? What particular facts of form, colour, materials, juxtaposition of detail, arrangement, contrast, balance of parts, &c., can I learn from it? Can I assimilate, as it were, certain valuable facts embodied therein; fortify my own perceptions thereby; and in some future act of my art, show that I have practically gained by this analysis? Mind, I do not advocate any tedious turning and turning about, sketching and note-writing, about every interesting specimen met with; life is scarcely long enough for this; but it is astonishing how rapidly, intuitively as it were, valuable facts and impressions are apprehended by the mind which has trained itself to habits of active observation and analysis of this nature; a few brief glances will then often tell the student more than he could retail in ten pages of description.

Let us take up this object—the famous Gloucester candlestick—one of the bronze altar candlesticks of Gloucester Cathedral at about the year 1115, perhaps made at Gloucester, but more likely at Cologne. Now, on our principle of culling knowledge from every source, if I had any particular subject uppermost in my mind, it is pretty certain I should be immediately struck with any fact or peculiarity seeming to have a bear-

ing on that subject. Now this is a specimen of very remarkable, and indeed beautiful art, in cast metal; and it strikes me that it offers valuable suggestions for the treatment of cast metal—cast iron, I mean, employed on a grand scale—for observe how completely this utensil is architectural in treatment. Of course, it was designed, and perhaps executed, by an architect—by an artist, in short, who in all probability would have built a great minster, as well as executed its ritualistic furniture, and all with the same noble uniformity and congruity of style. Doubtless, the maker of this article was a cloistered monk, working to the glory of God in this his practical way. But let us consider this work. Have we not, to all intents and purposes, a rich and beautiful column, with its base and capital, intervening shaft and central band or knot? Now it strikes me that the rich and intricate interlaced ornamentation is admirably suggestive for the modern treatment of cast-iron work. Of course, considered as a column, we might elongate its proportions to any extent, even to those of the slenderest shaft. Now the proper artistic treatment of cast iron in architecture is a most interesting and important problem—one that architects are bound to take serious note of; for it is certain that this material, whether we like it or not, will play a far more important part of architecture than it has hitherto done; and on the suggestive qualities in the material itself, together with a coincident reference to the peculiar treatment—the æsthetic expression, if I may call it—of monuments in cast metal of past epochs or styles, alone, I think, can be gradually considered the leading features of a consistent and genuine style of treatment

of this new material. I have not time to dwell in detail on this matter, otherwise I would enlarge on the radical difference of artistic expression which should be made to prevail betwixt works in cast and wrought metal—how ornamentation in cast metal should not suggest carving in iron or stone; how, in consequence, it should rather be in full high relief, under-cut, or in open work, than in bas-relief; and taking up one specimen after another of different ages and schools from amongst our collections, I could show how leading principles were embodied and illustrated by them; but to show how intimately the different arts are connected with each other—in the question of cast-iron ornamental architecture, we are not concerned with form alone, colour also forces itself strongly upon us. *We must paint iron; it cannot be left with its irregular coating of rust and dirt.* Iron architecture, moreover, naturally takes the shape of a slender framework or skeleton. Shafts, girders, slender arch-bands, spandrels, string-courses, narrow horizontal fascia, and, generally speaking, a multiplicity of detail, necessarily result from the physical qualities of the material; and the very meagreness, the linear character, and multiplicity of parts at once suggest the use of colour as the natural means of giving emphasis, richness, and variety to decorative construction in this material. Here then, at once, a field of the widest and most interesting nature presents itself; and surely here, if anywhere, the trammels of bygone styles may be shaken off? This one subject, colour, as applied to interior architecture, would alone furnish ample matter for a lecture; it is a field in which precedent example will be most precious, and where, happily, this Museum can boast an unequalled store of illustrative matter. For instance, there is, first, an admirable series of original drawings of painted wall decorations from the principal monuments of Italian art, some of them are hung around this room; but here again the student must cull from indirect sources; and here, under my hand, occurs an original monument, which illustrates this theme in a very interesting manner—I allude to this splendid charm or reliquary of the same period, and perhaps the same school, as the Gloucester candlestick. What, indeed, could be more suggestive than the striking contrasts of sculptured metal and brilliant colour here exhibited? How rich, and yet how harmonious and free from gaudiness are the Champléré enamels of this fine work. Note the admirable taste with which these miniature columns are picked out in gold and colours, each of different design, yet harmonizing perfectly one with another; here is no want of balance, nothing fragmentary nor disturbing, no discordant contrasts interfering with the general repose or stability of the

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composition as a whole—in short, I cannot but regard this object, and others of similar style in our collections—for instance, this beautiful enamelled triptych—as practical examples of the highest value; and I maintain that their great historical or archaeological importance is at least equalled by their actual suggestive use to the art student. But our time is rapidly passing, and I feel that I am yet only on the threshold of my subject. I had intended to have taken a chronological method as the most convenient—that is, going from century to century; to pass rapidly in review the different classes and modes of art to which each age and country gave rise—at least, as they are illustrated by actual monuments in the Museum; but it is obvious we have only time for a few disconnected examples. Now the Museum is very rich in Byzantine or Romanesque art—in my opinion, a most original and interesting phase—one, moreover, to be studied rather in decorative utensils and objects of a portable nature, than in great buildings which, in the lapse of so many centuries, have nearly all perished or lost their original character. The first great awakening of art in Europe took place in Germany, under the successors of Charlemagne; and the second Otto, by his family connection with the Byzantine Court, introduced all manner of skilled craftsmen from the East, whose varied and ingenious technical processes took root, and speedily bore more excellent fruit than in the East itself. Western Europe was then preparing to take that great stride onwards which speedily led it to dominate over the East alike in arts and arms. The great old city of Cologne was, as I believe, thenceforth, perhaps for at least two centuries, the prime centre of art in Europe; thence proceeded those noble works in metal, such as the seven-branched candelabra, the so-called “trees” of Milan, Brunswick, Essen in Westphalia, Hilderheim, Prague, and, I fear, I must class our own Gloucester candelabra as a work of this school, though I would fain believe it to be of English origin. I know, for instance, nothing of any age superior, either in design or technical execution, to that stupendous work, the *albero* of Milan Cathedral, a production unquestionably of German art

(To be concluded in our next.)

ON THE ART COLLECTIONS AT SOUTH KENSINGTON, CON-
SIDERED IN REFERENCE TO ARCHITECTURE.

By J. C. ROBINSON, F.S.A., &c.*

(Concluded from page 427.)

THE beautiful Champlévé enamels we have already alluded to are of prior origin, and of much higher merit than the better known and more abundant ones of Limoges. Our Museum affords numerous examples of both. Then, again, what a mine of varied instruction is presented by the numerous monuments in carved ivory—the croziers, book-cover, plaques, diptychs, the mosaics, nielli, and book illuminations of this fertile period!—in all these branches the Museum affords characteristic specimens. At this early time, moreover, textile art had arrived at singular perfection; and I cannot but allude to an important collection of specimens in this class, which the Museum has recently acquired—I mean the extraordinary gathering of ancient fabrics and articles of costume formed by that distinguished archæologist, Dr. Franz Bock, Canon of Aix-la-Chapelle. I am happy to announce that the Museum has acquired upwards of one hundred specimens from that collection; and I trust the remainder of the series, making in all about 450 pieces, will ultimately be secured. I have hung around some few examples, but by no means the most important, for the bulk of the specimens are not yet ready for exhibition. Now, this collection alone is a treasure of flat ornamentation of the most admirable and diversified kind. From the 6th or 7th century downwards, there is a complete series of the most exquisitely beautiful textile fabrics ever produced, chiefly the splendid tissues of Byzantium, the costliest products of the looms of Cologne, of Bruges, Venice, and Palermo. This collection, in its entirety, is, and will doubtless ever remain, unique and unapproached in importance. Not a few of the specimens, for instance, have been the shrouds and rich pontificals of ancient ecclesiastics rescued from the tomb; others the envelopes of relics—many, indeed, relics themselves, having been the known vestments of sainted ecclesiastics, preserved from generation to generation in their own churches and monasteries. Now, our English Mediaevalists are beginning to take note of textile art as within their province; here then is a boon to them; but I need scarcely say that for all art in which colour and geometrical or flat ornament is concerned, for wall diapers, painted glass, &c., the truly beautiful stuffs of the Middle Ages, dwarfing into insignificance, as they certainly do, all our modern products, are an indispensable source of study.

We now come to that great era of art which I may perhaps, for want of a better title, still be allowed to call the *Gothic system or style*.

I do not employ the term *Christian art*, simply on account of its too great comprehensiveness, though it is here, in a certain sense, very properly applied, inasmuch as, for the first time, we have a new and perfectly original art system, in which Pagan antiquity had absolutely no share, and to which it was radically and essentially antagonistic. I shall not occupy your time with æsthetical or historical speculations as to the origin of this Gothic architecture—it was the spontaneous and genuine

expression of a peculiar state of society in Western Europe. Chivalry, the feudal system, and the ardent unquestioning faith, stimulated by romantic mysticism, of the Roman Catholic Church, produced, in fact, in the 13th and 14th centuries, an art so wonderfully complete and original, so rich and varied, and yet so inflexible in its leading principles and forms, that it seems impossible either to take from or add to it—it seems to me, indeed, that the greatest tribute we can pay to this system is to avow that we must be content with an humble and loving imitation of it or its entire abandonment.

But whether we continue to work in the spirit of this style, or whether we abandon it, the deep and earnest study of Gothic art is, I think, incumbent on every architect; and, moreover, it will not alone suffice to study

the stone, brick, and wood constructions, and the sculptured enrichments of Gothic buildings: the true student must master every phase of its expression, make himself familiar with the peculiar rendering and treatment of Gothic ornamental design in every vehicle. The Museum is very rich in works of this great phase of art.

We may commonly class work of the Mediaeval or Gothic period under two heads—namely, ecclesiastical and secular or domestic. Generally speaking, from obvious causes, objects in the latter class are the more rare. There are, nevertheless, to be found many most interesting and suggestive works of domestic origin. I may specify the numerous and diversified series of coffrets or caskets in every possible decorative material—iron, brass, wood, ivory, leather, &c., carved, painted, embossed, chiselled—every variety of manipulation with the hammer and file, the graving tool, or the gouge, may be here seen, each instrument fashioning its appropriate material into forms of beauty, differing as widely as possible in their decorative expression or styles one from another, modified again by the different modes of view of the respective nations of Mediaeval Europe. Here we may note French Gothic, differing with an infinity of shades of variation from the neighbouring Flemish and German contemporary versions; England, again, displaying its own beautiful peculiarities; and Italy and Spain, southern lands, where the Gothic never fairly struck root, nevertheless offering us occasionally motives of admirable originality and beauty. Then let us take into consideration the goldsmith's or metal-worker's craft: here are splendid altar-crosses, reliquaries, monstrances, chalices, &c., in rich array; drinking cups, salt cellars, bowls; and in the more robust art of the blacksmith, what an admirable series of locks, handles, hinges, knockers, coffers, &c., does this collection offer for the direct practical study of the architect and designer for industrial art! How completely in this phase of art, for instance, may we study the natural and consistent, and therefore, most artistic treatment of wrought as opposed to cast metal; how completely may we note that the hammer and file have, as it were, a language of their own, whilst at the same time we never see this language misapplied!

In wood and ivory carving the Museum also possesses fine works of Gothic art; and here again their use to the architect and the art-workman is often direct. But I must dwell no longer on this style; we will pass to the next great phase, the Renaissance—the Quattro-Cento and Cinque-Cento of the Italians, and, as I suppose I ought to say, the Elizabethan of our own country—though this last designation, applying as it does only to one particular period, by no means adequately responds to the foreign terms, which, from the poverty of our English art nomenclature, we are obliged to make use of. We are now coming nearer to our own times, and naturally we have a greater abundance and variety of art monuments than of the earlier epochs. The diversity of style, generic, national, or local and individual, not less than the vast variety of modes and processes, now render it hopeless even to attempt any general review of the specimens in this extensive category; and as our time is so limited, I shall select for notice one or two classes of works only which seem to bear upon matters of special interest at the present moment.

My own predilections are strongly in favour of Italian art, of that truly wonderful epoch, the 15th century; and I hold with, as I think, the majority of writers and connoisseurs, that the so-styled fine arts—painting, sculpture, and architecture—at the close of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century, attained, *in Italy*, to a crisis or pitch of perfection, beyond which, speaking in a general manner, it was impossible to carry them, and at which level they could not be permanently maintained. Our eloquent President, if I recollect rightly, in his opening address, somewhat discountenanced the idea of crises or culminating points in art. Nevertheless, I am almost tempted to adopt the notion that there is some occult law of development for society, or the world at large, analogous to that of the growth and decay of individuals; that the world of art, at all events, does in reality pass through repeating cycles of, as it were, youthful progress, manly perfection, and the decrepitude of age;

and that, for instance, just as ancient art attained to its culminating point in the age of Phidias and Praxiteles, and then for many centuries gradually declined, the sacred flame of art at last waning to the feeblest glimmer in the dark night of universal barbarism, so, having reached the lowest point, then, again, there was a slow but certain revival, till at last it grew again to a second sun-like blaze, in the full light of which stand out the giant forms of Donatello, Brunelleschi, Michael Angelo, Raffaele. Have we passed the lowest point of decline since this; or are we again, with fluctuating intervals of apparent revival, slowly moving in a downward path? I would fain believe that we are again marching onwards in a fresh career, and that the next great dwelling-place of art will be in this our own England. But I am digressing, when there is no time to lose. It is now not a little difficult to choose amongst the mass of treasures in this division of our collection.

The Italian sculptures, I need scarcely say, offer examples of exceeding value to architects; some of them, such as the marble singing-gallery of Santa Maria Novella, are indeed in themselves complete architectural monuments, practically illustrating numerous points in the application of decorative sculpture on set architectural forms. Moreover, a careful consideration of other specimens, which, at first sight, might appear to have no direct bearing upon architecture, will, I think, well repay the student; most instructive facts and suggestions may indeed often be gleaned from figures or reliefs viewed as detached specimens, even where there is no certain record of the monuments they originally

adorned; for instance, in the works of that truly great artist, Donatello, and here I am happy to say, that no other museum, not even that of Florence itself, can boast such a series of original works of Donatello and his scholars as this. What a wonderful power then is here displayed of dealing with the principles of relief! Sometimes, for instance, we may see apparently the most harsh and abrupt forms in high relief, disagreeable and even repulsive in themselves, assuming the most beautiful and consistent aspects when placed in their proper light, or considered with reference to the part they were destined to sustain in a general architectural composition; and, on the other hand, modes of relief so refined and delicate, so very low or flat, as to be almost, as it were, like painting in marble; and in this manner we may see the most crowded and elaborate subjects most distinctly and strikingly rendered, and yet with a repose and tranquility of aspect of itself most beautiful; and this, perhaps, when the work was intended to adorn some plain wall-space, enlivening it with richly-storied sculpture, without interfering with its obvious stability and breadth of effect. Here occurs to me a striking and most original instance of this mode of treatment, and I cannot forbear to specify it, both because it is almost unknown, and also from its remarkable suggestiveness—I instance, then, that most noble and original Renaissance church, San Francisco, at Rimini, where the entire surface of the marble interior walls of one side of the nave, with its chapels, are covered with sculpture, apparently carved in the mass of the walls after their erection—and not laid on or encrusted—quite, in fact, on the principle of the ancient Egyptian and Assyrian wall-sculptures. Nothing in Italian art ever struck me as more beautiful or more generally remarkable than the grand figures of saints and angels of almost colossal proportions, filling the vast wall-spaces of this church; and I could not fail to note the skilful manner in which the degree or style of relief was varied in every part to suit the light which illumined its particular position.

These noble sculptures are believed to be, mainly, the work of Luca della Robbia; and here the mention of this great artist brings me to the consideration of an art which is believed to have owed its origin to him, which has a particular interest for us at the present time now that efforts are being made to revive it, and of which the Museum possesses a complete and unrivalled series of specimens—I mean the works in glazed and enamelled terra cotta, generally known as Della-Robbia ware. But first let me apologize for having dwelt at such disproportionate length on the matters already passed in review.

I find I must give up the idea of taking into consideration many special branches of art, in many respects as important as those we have touched upon. The objects in the various categories of mosaic, marqueterie, or intarsiatura work; wood-carving in innumerable applications, especially where illustrated in the fine series of Italian carved furniture; the cassoni, chairs, cabinets, &c.; then again the works in metal, of iron and monumental bronze; illustration of the various processes of repoussé work, chiselling, damascene work, niello, &c.; painted glass and enamels; processes and productions, in short, without number. I can but allude to them in order to dismiss them from our consideration, and in doing so I am conscious that my lecture to-night has been but an irregular and spasmodic attempt to grasp a subject too vast to be treated within such limits. In conclusion, then, I will ask your permission to dwell for a very brief space on the subject of Italian ceramic wares, and, in particular, on the enamelled terra cotta, as one which has for many years specially engaged my attention. Our collection of majolica and Della Robbia wares is, undoubtedly, the most important in existence. I do not separate the two classes of productions, because they are, in fact, only different manifestations of the same art. We have, indeed, a most important and unique series of works painted on the flat in the manner of majolica plates, by Luca della Robbia himself. I allude to the twelve large circular medallions from the Campana collection, representing impersonations of the twelve months, and which, there is little doubt, were portions of the famous ceiling of the writing cabinet of Cosmo de Medici, particularly mentioned by Vasari. My travelled hearers will here, doubtless, be reminded of the bacili, or circular painted plates, let into the walls and campaniles of so many ancient Italian churches. Now what an admirable suggestion does this adaptation of ceramic art alone offer to us? In what a variety of ways might we decorate not only exterior façades, but also the ceilings and interior walls of our buildings with enamel-painted pottery and terra-cotta reliefs! Amongst the majolica wares, what beautiful types, both in design and execution, may we not find for decoration of this kind? Take note of the splendid lustrated plates which might now be so readily and cheaply reproduced. What magnificent effects might not the curved surfaces of such brilliant wares—concave or convex, as the case may be—be made to produce, gleaming in the rays of the sun, like diamonds, rubies, and emeralds! Why should we not have rich architecture, jewelled, as it were, with such novel ornaments? And then considering the Della Robbia ware proper, what a field is there here! Why should not details of every kind be executed in this durable material—doorways, pilasters, friezes, decorative medallions, &c., to any extent? The incrustation of precious marbles which we see in Italy, the panels of porphyry, serpentine, &c., might be imitated, or rather superseded, by the still more brilliant-coloured surface of enamelled earthenware. Not that the improved technical processes at the command of the modern potters have as yet carried enamelled terra-cotta work further than of old. The technical perfection of the Della Robbia wares, indeed, is not their least remarkable characteristic: let me point to the huge medallion, 11 ft. in diameter, so conspicuous an object in the North Court of the Museum, displaying the arms and devices of King René of Anjou within a noble border of fruit and foliage; this magnificent specimen, doubtless from the hand of Luca himself, till within the last few years had remained in its original position on the exterior of a villa in the neighbourhood of Florence, ever since the period of its execution, at least 400 years ago, and, except where it has been wilfully or accidentally damaged, it is literally as perfect as the day it was made, and the climate of Florence is, I believe, quite as inimical to the preservation of such works as that of England—the extremes of heat and cold are indeed much greater than in this country—but our modern English Della Robbia wares as yet do not give promise of such absolute durability.

Our practical potters, in fact, should come and study the works of

Della Robbia in our Museum, technically and scientifically, just as architects and art-workmen should take them into consideration from their point of view of art. We should note, for instance, what exquisite and appropriate qualities of glaze, texture of surface, and colour, these old wares present, so different from the glaring whiteness and crude glassy enamels of their modern imitations. In the original specimens, the white glaze is subdued to a beautiful creamy grey tint, in order that it should not contrast too vividly with the surrounding stonework of the wall in which the work was to be inserted; all the other colours, moreover, especially the blue, are broken or subdued in like manner, and for the same reason. The enamel glaze is mat rather than too bright, the white having all the full rich texture of marble, which it was designed to imitate. True specimens of della-robba ware, in short, are models of ceramic excellence, as much superior to their modern imitations in technical respects as they are as works of art.

The true secret of this excellence is that the great Florentine artist knew exactly what he wanted; he knew the precise qualities he wished to produce; whereas his modern imitators, both here and abroad, are floundering about for want of his refined judgment and intelligence in art, and not because of any special difficulties in the processes of production.

I must now bring my lecture to a close. From what I have said it will, I hope, be gathered that I also, in the appropriate and suggestive words of your President, am an advocate for a "free and scholarly art," for a proper-use of the glorious legacy of the past; and I feel that we are on safe ground in commending to all, both lay and professional, the efforts of such a society as the Architectural Museum. The aims and efforts of that institution are alike definite and practical; its action, and the spirit which animates its supporters, moreover, are eminently healthy ones—a spirit especially characteristic of this free country, and scarcely possible elsewhere; and whilst endeavouring to illustrate the bearing which the more extensive and important art collection of the State has to your especial object, architecture, I have by no means been insensible to the fact that the admirable collection of the Architectural Museum, also housed within these walls, created and mainly sustained as it has been by individual zeal and devotion to the cause of art education, is by no means the least useful feature of the great assemblage of monuments of art which has already made South Kensington one of the chief art centres of the world.
